

## **Explanation of the English Language Arts Support Seminars**

In the first two years of teaching, many English language arts teachers struggle in their attempts to facilitate student-centered discussions of literature and to support students as they learn how to revise their own writings. These two areas represent the featured lessons in the Beginning Teacher Assessment Portfolios for English language arts teachers, and therefore the foci of the support seminars. Since Indiana's student learning standards also focus on reading and writing processes, the teaching portfolios and the student standards are closely aligned.

In order to teach Indiana students in English language arts, a licensed teacher must demonstrate the pedagogical knowledge necessary to support students in these areas. The teaching portfolio allows for such demonstrations of knowledge and performance. The portfolio poses questions that guide beginning teachers toward a deeper understanding of what Indiana's English language arts teachers should know and be able to do to support student learning in their classrooms.

- What does standards-based teaching look like in an English Language Arts classroom?
- Which instructional strategies and classroom environments will support all students in their development as readers, writers, and thinkers?
- What are some of the most effective ways to monitor student learning, collect evidence of it, and use the information that the evidence provides to improve classroom instruction?
- How can a teacher use both the teaching and learning standards to create active, engaged classrooms where all students have opportunities to develop as readers, writers, and thinkers?

When portfolio scorers read the Beginning Teacher Assessment Portfolios, they consider how the portfolio artifacts (videotapes, reflective commentaries, samples of student work, lesson plans) demonstrate a second year teacher's performance. The following questions guide the scoring process and the conversations in the support seminars.

- Does the beginning teacher understand what students in Indiana should know and be able to do in English/Language Arts?
- Is the beginning teacher able to organize instruction, assessment and the classroom environment to support students as they respond to texts, ideas, perspectives and styles in their experiences with language and literature?
- Can the beginning teacher collect evidence that gives an accurate picture of students' learning?
- Does the beginning teacher reflect on students' learning performances and adjust instructional practices to enhance student learning?

The Support Seminars offered to new teachers who piloted the Indiana performance portfolios were conducted by master teachers who modeled standards-based lessons and facilitated rich professional conversations about the issues that many new teachers face as they begin their careers. As schools and other institutions assume the "support" role for new teachers, they need to consider the value of content-specific coaching by experienced standards-based teachers. The intent of the seminars is to engage new teachers in the professional conversations of their discipline and to model strategies and professional dispositions that lead to gains in student learning.

The format of the support seminars designed by the IPSB models "best practices" for teacher-learning (i.e., more active learning – less lecture; more collaboration – less isolated planning; more use of evidence from students' performances – less use of "what we have always done").

The initial seminars designed for the first year were developed by the Support Seminar Leaders and Teachers-in-Residence to engage teachers in conversations about standards-based teaching and learning. All of the seminars allowed new teachers opportunities to practice the skills they would need when preparing their portfolios (skills such as profiling learners, videotaping discussions, examining samples of student work, and writing reflective commentaries), but the first year's seminars did not focus on the specifics of the portfolio assessment. Seminar leaders did not discuss the portfolio handbook in the sessions until the end of the first year in order to keep the focus of the first year seminars on the experiences that new teachers were encountering within their ELA classrooms.

The seminars (See models provided for the first three) were designed to help beginning teachers link the teaching and learning standards, learn effective instructional strategies, practice these strategies in their own classrooms, and share the results in collaborative environments within the seminar. In each seminar, new teachers were given opportunities to share their successes and challenges, and the leaders constructed follow-up seminars to help beginning teachers address these challenges in effective ways. The outlines for the first three seminars provide examples of the kinds of activities that occurred in the seminars, but each one conducted across the state was slightly different depending on the needs of the group.

The seminars conducted during the second year provided new teachers opportunities to share their emerging practices with others and work together to create lessons for the portfolio. These sessions focused on the tasks outlined in the portfolio handbook. In each seminar, new teachers brought samples of their own work (videos, commentaries, lesson plans) to share with peers. Using the evaluation framework provided in the handbook, new teachers assessed their own and their colleagues portfolio artifacts and discussed the challenges they faced in selecting units, arranging videotaping, and profiling learners. The seminar leaders clarified instructions within the handbook and guided new teachers as they built realistic timelines for completing the assessment tasks.

Understanding the developmental needs of new teachers as they progress through the year, as well the needs of adult learners, is critical for the facilitators of these seminars.\* As schools develop their own support sessions for new teachers, they may need to train their master teachers in both the content-specific concerns that new teachers are likely to express and the developmental needs of these teachers as they progress through the first years in the profession.

\* For information about the developmental needs of new teachers, see Ellen Moir's "The Stages of a Teacher's First Year," in *A Better Beginning: Supporting and Mentoring New Teachers* (1999), edited by Marge Scherer and published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. {1-800-933-2723 or [www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org)}